

A HISTORY
OF INDIAN LITERATURE

GEORGE LUZERNE HART

THE RELATION BETWEEN TAMIL
AND
CLASSICAL SANSKRIT LITERATURE

OTTO HARRASSOWITZ · WIESBADEN

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George Luzerne Hart

THE RELATION BETWEEN TAMIL
AND
CLASSICAL SANSKRIT LITERATURE

I

A COMMON SOURCE FOR TAMIL AND SANSKRIT
LITERATURE

Any scholar who is familiar with Sanskrit literature knows at once upon seeing the poems of ancient Tamil "Sangam" literature of the first through the third centuries A.D. that they are related to Sanskrit literature of classical times. And if he is at all well acquainted with Tamil, he is certain to feel that there must be some important meaning to the resemblance between the two literatures, for the two languages in which they are written are quite unrelated, and the earliest of Tamil literature does not seem to be much influenced by Sanskrit—the similarities are not close enough to be copying by one literature of another. In the past, most have simply assumed that Tamil must have borrowed from Sanskrit, but no careful analysis has been made. This relationship is investigated in detail by me in *The Poems of Ancient Tamil: Their Milieu and Their Sanskrit Counterparts* to be published by the University of California Press. The purpose of this chapter is to point out the general character of the relationship between Sanskrit and Tamil, to discover reasons for it, and to suggest some of the consequences of the relationship. It will not be possible to give here all of the evidence that I have assembled, or to go into each aspect in detail; the book does that. Indeed, I have endeavoured here to cover areas not investigated in my book. I hope that the interested reader will find the references to the book sufficient to fill in the gaps which must necessarily occur in this short investigation of a very large subject.

At first glance, the most striking similarity between the two literary traditions is the use of the same or similar conventions. Examples are the messenger poem, the motif of separation of lovers during the monsoon, and the comparison of the sound of the wind blowing in a hole in bamboo to the noise of a flute. The messenger poem does not occur in Sanskrit before Kālidāsa, but it is found in

Tamil in the Sangam poems. An example is Akanāṇūru 170, in which a woman speaks to a sanderab of her lover:

The grove will not tell him,
the backwater will not tell him,
the punnai tree, its fragrant flowers humming with bees, will not tell him.
Except for you, I have no one to tell that man
in whose bay bees swarm,
drawn by the scent of the redolent petals of waterlilies
flowering like eyes in the dark backwater,
and eat the cool pollen,
and get so drunk they cannot fly.
You must tell him, sanderab.
Say, "Will she cross over the grief she feels
who many times dispelled your sadness
on midnights when a little crow sat languishing
on the low branch of a screwpine bush by the sea
with his loving mate,
unable to hunt in waters infested with sharks,
and dreamed of white shrimps?"

The most famous Sanskrit example is, of course, Kālidāsa's Meghadūta, in which a Yakṣa exiled by his lord Kubera from the Himālayas to the Vindhya mountains asks a cloud to take a message of consolation to his beloved. This is a good example of poetic construction being shared by the two traditions. Another example of this is the dramatis personae of the love poems, which include the hero, the heroine, the heroine's female friend, the heroine's mother, and a messenger.¹

The separation of lovers during the monsoon is an example of a shared motif or theme. It occurs first in Indo-Aryan in the Sattasaī. In poem 538 of that anthology, for example, the traveller's wife says, "As I hear the thunder, it is like the executioner's drum." Similarly in Kuṇṭukai 216, she says, "Not knowing I am so much to be pitied, the black clouds still roar and rain and send lightning, friend, aiming at my life." This theme appears also in later Sanskrit, as in Subhāṣitaratnakośa 708:

"Here comes the downpour, here the lightning and the cursed hail,
the roar of thunder and the croaking frogs."
Thus speaking with each rapid breath, the slender maid,
already close to death, enflames
the fire which love has spread throughout her limbs.²

Another important theme that first appears in the Sattasaī in the Indo-Aryan tradition but that is found before that in Tamil is the *abhisārikā*, the woman who goes out to meet her lover at night. In Sattasaī 445, the heroine tells her lover, "O ingrateful one! I still see the village mud I went through

¹ GEORGE L. HART, *The Poems of Ancient Tamil: Their Milieu and Their Sanskrit Counterparts*, Berkeley, California, 1975, pp. 214-216.

² In: *An Anthology of Sanskrit Court Poetry: Vidyākara's "Subhāṣitaratnakośa"* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), translated and commented on by DANIEL H. H. INGALLS.

to get to you on rainy nights." In 6.43 of Kālidāsa's Kumārasambhava, *abhisārikās* are said to find their way by the light of herbs on bad days. In Subhāṣitaratnakośa 829, an anonymous poet writes,

These beauties, silencing their anklets by knotting of their skirts
and binding up the jewelled clasp within the extra fold,
attempt to render silent their amorous expeditions.
Alas to no avail, for they are marked upon their way
by the jingling swarm of bees
that seek the honey of the flowers in their hair.³

To these verses may be compared Akanāṇūru 192, where the mountain village of the lovers' rendezvous is enlightened by the jewel dropped by a snake, and Akanāṇūru 198, where the heroine comes to the rendezvous "scared, keeping her thick anklets from rattling, bent like a cocked bow and wearing cool flowers so bees follow behind her at a time when the city sleeps."

Perhaps the most striking of all are specific themes which the two literatures share, an example of which is the comparison of the wind blowing in a hole in bamboo to the sound of a flute. In Akanāṇūru 225, for example, the poet writes that the wind blows "in a narrow hole penetrated by a bee in swaying bamboo and makes a lovely sound, like the music from the flute of a cowherd leading his herd to water." This may be compared to Meghadūta 56, where hollow bamboos are said to resound sweetly as they are filled with breezes, or to Raghuvamśa 2.12, where songs sung by nymphs are said to be accompanied by humming bamboos whose holes are filled by wind and which provide the music of flutes.

A chronological survey of these shared conventions, of which it was possible to find hundreds, shows that very few of them appear as early as the Mahābhārata and the Rāmāyaṇa, that a few more appear in the Buddhacarita, and that virtually the entire spectrum of them appears in Hāla's Sattasaī, the earliest parts of which are about contemporary with the Tamil poems.⁴ Indeed, virtually every poem of the Hāla anthology uses one or more of the Tamil conventions. In Kālidāsa and subsequent Sanskrit writers, the shared conventions are used quite often, though not with such frequency as in Hāla. In other words, a detailed survey of the shared themes shows that a few are present in the Sanskrit epics, but that there is a large influx of them into Indo-Aryan in the Sattasaī and afterwards in classical Sanskrit poetry.⁵

Two other elements of the Tamil poems also proved to be related to Sanskrit and Prakrit literature. It was possible to show that Āryā and other similar metres based on syllabic instants are closely related to the Tamil metres used in the earliest Tamil literature⁶ and that the techniques of suggestion employed

³ Ibid.

⁴ See ARTHUR BERRIEDALE KEITH, A History of Sanskrit Literature, London, 1920, pp. 223-224.

⁵ See HART, op. cit., pp. 211-257, pp. 285-290.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 197-210.

by the ancient Tamil poets is similar to the techniques used in the *Sattasaī* and by *Kālidāsa* and later writers.⁷

This evidence taken together suggests strongly that both Tamil and Sanskrit derived their shared conventions, metres, and techniques from a common source, for it is clear that neither borrowed directly from the other. Tamil did not borrow from Sanskrit because many of the conventions appear first in Tamil, the metre is not native to Sanskrit (but is to Tamil), and the related elements are not identical to their Sanskrit counterparts (as, for example, some of the conventions in medieval Malayalam are). And Sanskrit did not borrow from Tamil because clearly the Sanskrit writers were not acquainted with the Tamil tradition and because, again, the resemblance between the two literatures is not close enough to indicate direct borrowing. Moreover, the evidence shows that for the most part the shared elements entered the Indo-Aryan tradition in *Māhārāṣṭrī* Prakrit, the language of Hāla's *Sattasaī*. It is of great significance that this southernmost of Prakrits was used in an area where Dravidian and Aryan languages came into contact, an area which even today is characterized by a mixture of North and South Indian customs, and in the *Sātavāhana* empire, which embraced Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh, areas of Aryan and Dravidian speech. Archeologically, the area of *Māhārāṣṭrī* coincides with the northern limit of the Megalithic Civilization, which existed in South India primarily on the Deccan plateau in the first millennium B.C. and was characterized by uniformity over space and time.⁸ In other words, the culture of Maharashtra in the first centuries A.D. was a fusion of Aryan and Deccan (or Dravidian). The early Tamil culture, on the other hand, was descended directly from the megalithic culture of South India; indeed, the poems even mention some of the burial practices which characterize the megalithic culture. Thus a case is made that the shared elements, or at least most of them, are taken by both Tamil and Sanskrit from the same megalithic culture of the Deccan.

This theory has many important consequences. For one thing, it has been common to trace Indian literatures back to the Vedas. I would suggest that another source can be discovered—the heritage from the megalithic culture. For another thing, this theory explains much regarding the sudden emergence of Sanskrit classical literature in the centuries after Christ (and especially in the time of *Kālidāsa*). It suggests that *Kālidāsa* was copying two traditions, one North Indian and one South Indian, to create a literature unlike what had gone before. Finally, this theory has important historical consequences: if classical Sanskrit literature derived important elements from a South Indian source, other expressions of classical North Indian civilization may have done so as well.⁹

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 161–196.

⁸ B. and R. ALLCHIN, *The Birth of Indian Civilization: India and Pakistan before 900 B.C.*, Baltimore, Md., 1968, p. 232.

⁹ I have treated some of these shared cultural ideas and traits in the first part of my book (HART, *op. cit.*). In my view, the most important of them are the

But simply to state these consequences is not to demonstrate their significance. Such a demonstration is dependent upon an analysis of the development and the original significance of the shared elements, upon a careful demonstration of how the elements entered classical Sanskrit, and finally upon an analysis of how such elements were ultimately used in Sanskrit.

First of all, it is necessary to describe the society which gave rise to the Tamil poems and the circumstances under which the literature arose. The chief element in the weltanschauung of the Tamils was the force which they called *ṇṇāṇku*. This power, which no doubt played much the same role in the Deccani civilization as it did in Tamil civilization of the time of the anthologies, was a potentially dangerous sacred force which was considered to inhere in any object or person thought to be especially potent for a number of reasons. Anything in which it inhered had to be carefully controlled, lest the power go out of control and wreak havoc. But if *ṇṇāṇku* were present in its proper place and under control, then it lent to things a sacred correctness and fitness which was the most important of all criteria to be satisfied for human fulfilment. Among the places in which this power inhered were a chaste woman, a king, certain drums, special columns, memorial stones inhabited by the spirits of dead heroes, dead bodies, widows, and women in their menstrual or puerperal periods. In certain places, it was potentially more unstable than in others, but under all circumstances it had to be carefully controlled. For example, it was strongly present in a chaste wife; if she should fail to keep her chastity, then *ṇṇāṇku* would go out of control, bringing destruction to her husband and perhaps also to others. In a widow, especially a chaste widow, its condition was even more precarious, so that she had to commit herself to the strongest type of asceticism to keep her power under control. Indeed, even such asceticism might not be enough; the only way for a young chaste widow really to keep her power from running amok was for her to take her own life on her husband's funeral pyre.

ṇṇāṇku, then, was a force that was present in all sacredly charged objects, whose very presence constituted the presence of the sacred. Furthermore, it was dangerous and if not handled correctly could go out of control and result in catastrophe. It is not strange that there were special classes of people whose occupation was to keep this power, which was so important to the right functioning of all things in the world, in its proper condition. Of course, every society has had its priests, those who keep magic or spiritual forces in their proper places and invoke them at the proper time. What distinguishes the Tamil guardians of this power is that they themselves were thought to be dangerous, as they had to possess *ṇṇāṇku* to control it elsewhere. Thus they

conception of woman (pp. 93–119), of the king (pp. 13–14, 86–93), and of pollution (pp. 81–137). I have further discussed the role of woman in two articles: *Woman and the Sacred in Ancient Tamilnad*, *Journal of Asian Studies*, 32, 2 (February 1973), pp. 233–250, and *Some Aspects of Kinship in Ancient Tamil Literature*, *Kinship and History in South Asia*, ed. Thomas Trautmann, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1974, pp. 29–60.

belonged to the lowest castes. Even today, the lowest castes in South India have special powers for telling the future and working magic. It is curious that the manipulators of sacred power in ancient Tamilnad were not all of the same caste, but belonged to different castes according to the situation under which they dealt with *anañku*. This shows that *anañku* is in some ways analogous to *mana* among the Polynesians. Only a man with the proper *mana* can make a canoe, just as only a man of the proper caste can throw a net to catch fish, or only a man of a certain caste can play a certain drum. The difference lies in the fact that the forces work in opposite ways. *Mana* renders the king dangerous, so that those below him must be careful not to touch him, while *anañku* renders those at the bottom of the social ladder dangerous, so that those above must be careful in their contacts with them.

Among the most important of the low castes which dealt with this dangerous power are the three castes whose occupation had to do with producing oral literature. In ancient Tamil society, the king was one of the foci of sacred forces. So strong was the concentration of power in his sacred person that many measures had to be undertaken to control it. As long as it was under control, things would go well: his lands would flourish and his subjects would prosper. But when it went out of control, havoc would break loose all over the kingdom. The rains might fail, or the kingdom might be destroyed by enemies. In order to keep *anañku* in check, the king had to be just and impartial; and he had to be surrounded by oral poets of three of the lowest castes who performed certain services to control the king's power.

One of the most important of their functions was to produce and sing panegyrics to the king at certain times. Every morning when the king awoke and symbolically returned from the other world, a caste called *Kiñaimakaṇ*s (those who play the *kiṇai* drum) would stand in front of the gate of his palace and sing his praises, receiving payment for their service. Another caste, the *Pāṇaṇ*s, would sing certain types of songs to the king at certain times of day, lending to the person of the king an aura of fitness. Both the *Kiñaimakaṇ*s and the *Pāṇaṇ*s, along with a third caste, the *Tuṭiyaṇ*s, whose chief function is not clear, would play their own special drums during battle, by which act they are actually said to supply the means for the king to cross over the sea of battle to victory.¹⁰ *Kiñaimakaṇ*s would play their drums at executions while *Tuṭiyaṇ*s would participate in rites to the memorial stone inhabited by a dead fallen hero. All three of the low bardic castes would sing over a wounded hero to guard him from the dangerous forces unleashed by battle to which he, being wounded, was especially vulnerable. The *Pāṇaṇ*s would play their lutes at the homes of high-class citizens, lending sacred fitness to their family life, which, as will be seen, was the second major focus of the sacred for the ancient Tamils.

It was not only the rites that these oral poets conducted that gave them their status; it was also their ability to imbue activities with a sacred fitness,

¹⁰ See *Puraṇāṇūru* 260 and *Patirruppattu* 75.

to prevent potential disorder. It is for this reason that there were three castes of music-makers, each with its own function: the lower castes seem to have been more highly differentiated than the higher castes because each dealt with sacred power intimately, and each had to have just the right fitness to perform its own sacred function properly.

So important is the bard's task of praising the king that an example is in order. In *Puranānūru* 22, the poet *Kuruñkōliyūrkiḷār*, imitating the song of a *Pāṇaṇ*, sings of the king *Cēramāṇ Yāṇaikkaṭṭēey Māntarañcēral Irumporai*:

In your camp,
 young elephants exuberant with strength
 sway as they stand tied to their posts
 with hanging trunks, strutting walks,
 bells ringing alternately at their sides,
 high tusks, foreheads like crescent moons,
 enraged glances, wide feet, huge necks,
 their fragrant ichor resounding with bees
 as if they were mountains flowing with honey,
 their large heads oozing pus where struck by the goad.
 At their side a white umbrella garlanded with pearls
 stands like the moon floating in the sky and pouring out its rays.
 In its shade, men sleep securely with no swords at their sides.
 There roofs covered with bunches of swaying red paddy
 laid over rows of soft sugarcane are variously resplendent
 as if it were a field where a festival had been celebrated.
 In that large place
 filled with the happy sound of pestles whose thumping never ceases,
 men put on their heads leaves of waving-tipped palmyra
 and green *tumpai* whose petals are of gold,
 and, carried away, seethe in the wild *kuravai* dance
 like waters moving in flood.
 O you who protect that large camp which needs no protection,
 murderous lord of those who live on high Kolli mountain,
 who make full the families of those who come to you
 with tribute given abjectly by enemy kings,
 O you who are like Murugan,
 victorious, fierce with your elephantlike glance,
 may your limitless wealth endure long, great one,
 our king who is able to give without restraint
 so that the resplendent and eloquent tongues of those who sing you
 sing no others.
 I have heard it said that the land protected by *Māntarañcēral Irumporai*
 is like the world of paradise,
 and so I came and have seen to my great joy.
 You are never indolent.
 With your army that assaults enemy lands,
 you act so that rice is in abundance,
 and you never relent in your efforts.

Here, in order to glorify the king the poet emphasizes two aspects: his valour in war and the fertility of his country. The camp of the king contains many elephants that are formidable in battle and that are likened in some respects

to cosmic phenomena—the moon and mountains. By this the poet means to imply that they are not ordinary animals, but that in war they become transfigured and enable the king and others to prevail on the battlefield where sacred forces uncontrolled run rampant. The umbrella of the king is one of his most important sacred symbols and possessions. It symbolizes his connection with the other world, and perhaps also his function of shielding his subjects from profane time, symbolized by the sun. In the shade of the umbrella, warriors sleep and need take no warlike precautions: the aura of the king and his sacred possessions is such that the kingdom and those in it are protected from war. The camp resembles a field for a festival. It is filled with the prosperous sound of thumping pestles and men dance ecstatically there. The festivals of ancient Tamilnad took place on auspicious days and in auspicious places so that people could become possessed by sacred power and dance ecstatically with minimal danger of the power going out of control. The poet makes the point that the king alone is sufficient to make his camp a place of sacred experience, and that the special circumstances of a festival are not needed. The king is like Murugan, the most powerful and important indigenous Tamil god. He is a model of generosity, the most important of virtues to the ancient South Indians and a quality without which a king could not control his power. Finally, the king's land is like paradise itself, so great is the sacred aura of the king. It should be emphasized that poems such as this are not meant merely for description and glorification. It was felt that such poems actually increased the king's fame and hence his sacred power, and that they helped create in the king the fitness needed to keep his sacred power under control. It is no accident that they were originally sung by low-caste poets whose functions included augmenting sacred power and keeping it under control in other situations—in battle, for example, when they played special drums.

The poems of the oral bards were divided into two categories, *puram* and *akam*, according to whether they concerned mainly the king and the sacred focus which he represented, or whether they concerned woman and marriage and the sacred focus which that represented for the Tamils. *Puram*, which means exterior, consists of poems that view the world from outside the family and that concern primarily the king. *Akam*, which means interior, consists of poems that view the world from inside the family and that concern love between man and woman in its many conventionalized facets.

In the foregoing discussion of the Tamil bards, *puram* poems have been described as being of sacred significance. But *akam* poems also had a sacred function: they maintained the values of the society and, when a bard sang in the house of a man and his wife, lent fitness to their relationship. Thus one of the most common *akam* themes in Tamil concerns the journey which the hero must make before he can marry. He must travel through a land devoid of water, where death lurks everywhere, in order to bring back gold for his marriage. A good example is *Akanāṇṭuru* 1, where the heroine speaks:

Mount Potinī, frequented by broken-tusked elephants,
 is ruled by the great Vēl Āvi,
 whose thick chaplet swarms with bees,
 whose anklets glisten,
 who drove off the Maḷavans, their horses fearful,
 and who wages war like Murugaṇ.
 There my lover gave his word:
 "I will no more leave you
 than the resin leaves the whetstone
 when put there by the child whetstone-maker."
 Has he forgotten his promise, friend?
 He has made my bamboo-like arms grow thin,
 for, greedy to bring back wealth of gold and jewels,
 he has crossed into the wilderness
 where the hot, firelike rays of the sun beat down
 splitting the earth and burning all green to brown
 so that dry trees cast no shadows;
 where rock ledges are scorched
 and waterless green springs are bone dry
 so that seeds falling into them are roasted in the heat;
 where robbers grow thin since no one goes on empty paths;
 and where swift whirling winds
 take bunched white flowers of fiberless *murukai* trees
 making their branches wave
 so the scene resembles a seashore boiling with spray
 from waves roaring as they break.

The poem opens with a description of the place where the hero swore his love. It is connected with social order and with sacred forces under control, for it is said to be ruled by a great king who is like Murugaṇ himself. The hero's love is likened to resin placed on the whetstone, another image of ordinary ordered society. To this is contrasted the world through which the hero must travel to bring back wealth. There is no order there, only dryness and death. It should be remembered that the hallmark of the great king's realm is abundant water and fertility. Thus the characteristic of its opposite here is a lack of water and of social control, symbolized by the presence of robbers. The hostility of the wilderness is captured in the remarkable simile at the end of the poem. Flowers blown in the wind there are like the spray on the seashore. By likening the wilderness to a place of fertility (for the seashore is the source of fish and other commodities), the poet emphasizes how dreadful it really is. Ultimately, the symbolism of this poem is of the initiate who must journey through the world of death to bring back a magic talisman before he can participate as a man in society—in this case, in the sacred experience of marriage. He must conquer and come to terms with the sacred in its disordered condition before he is fit to enter into the sacred experience of marriage, in which the sacred must be ordered if misfortune is not to result.

Another type of love poem in which Tamil notions of the sacred may be seen easily is about the journey which the hero makes to secretly meet his beloved before marriage. An example is Akanāṇūru 108:

Wise men should show mercy on the suffering of those who love them.
 Yet my man shows no kindness at all
 by his coming alone every night
 in the darkness where deadly beasts roam,
 preying on the lives of others,
 at the blackest time when rain comes down in sheets
 and lightning flares like a torch trailing sparks
 in the wide sky covered over by angry clouds
 and when hailstones formed from fresh water
 strike the spotted faces of elephants
 like pearls scattered over the tops of mountains
 and cover hills
 like pieces of crystal lying scattered.
 No, my man comes then,
 lord of a mountain in whose peaks clouds play,
 where, as the soft branches of *kāyā* touch them,
 like hoods which serpents spread
 when they fear peacocks covered with spots,
 the lovely flowers of *kāntaḷ*,
 its bunches waving like long, extended ladles,
 have pollen tasted by bees
 which resemble balls played with in peoples' hands.

Here the symbolism is that the man travels through a world of death into the sacred presence of his beloved. Thus his journey to her takes place in the middle of the night, when all is obscured to the senses. It is accompanied by rain, the bringer of fertility and an element whose sacred significance is especially important to the Tamils. In the magic land he must travel through, hail seems metamorphosed into pearls or crystal, both magic talismans. The heroine feels that the nocturnal journey of her lover is too dangerous and hints in the last part of the poem that it would be far preferable for him to marry her and for them to live in his land than for him to continue coming at night. The imagery suggests sexual bliss (the bee tasting the flower), domestic satisfaction (the ladles), and sacred fulfillment (*kāntaḷ* is sacred to Murugan, and the cobra is an animal filled with *aṇaṇku*).

The point is that in these poems, love between a human couple is not described for merely pleasure-giving purposes. Rather, hidden in the poems is a whole world view which stresses and inculcates notions which the Tamils have even today regarding marriage and the relationship between man and woman. The poems mirror the view that woman is a locus of sacred power and hence that the man who would possess a woman—especially a young, chaste woman, and especially a man who possesses her in an unorthodox manner by meeting her secretly—is exposing himself to great danger for the sake of a sacred, transfiguring experience.

Probably in the second or third century B.C., the Brāhmī syllabary was introduced into Tamilnad. A few centuries after this practical writing system was adapted for Tamil, there arose a class of people called Pulavaṇs, who wrote poems. Unlike the oral bards, these men were drawn almost exclusively from

the higher classes. But like the first literate poets in many other cultures, they looked for the subject matter and techniques of their poems to the oral poetry around them. In fact, many of their poems are actually put into the mouths of the low-caste oral bards. But this should not obscure the fact that their poems, some of which are collected in the Sangam anthologies, are polished productions of essentially literate men, far more sophisticated in grammar and diction than their oral models could have been.¹¹

It is virtually certain that oral bards similar to the Pāṇas and Kīṇaimakaṇs existed all through the Deccani megalithic culture. Even today in Orissa there is a low caste of musicians called Pāṇas, while through South India there are low castes whose functions include making music and working magic. Therefore we may theorize that the Mahārāṣṭrī poets whose poems occur in the Sattasaī (for it is extremely unlikely that all the poems in that anthology are by one man) are ultimately copies of the oral compositions of bards who lived with them. This accounts for the earthy flavour and folk quality of the poems. But an important point remains to be discussed: from where did Kālidāsa draw the themes in his works which appear also in Tamil? Is it possible that he took them ultimately from the poetic tradition of Maharashtrian Prakrit, of which the Sattasaī is an example?

It is certain that Kālidāsa knew of the Maharashtrian poetic tradition, for he himself composed in it, and his poems in Māhārāṣṭrī are not dissimilar to Hāla's poems. For example, in the fourth verse of the first act of the Abhi-jñānaśākuntalam, the Naṭi utters a verse in Māhārāṣṭrī:

Women, being gentle [*dayamānāḥ*], make (ear) ornaments of *śirīṣa* flowers, the ends of whose filaments are very soft, and which are gently [*iṣat*] kissed by bees.

Here the male lover is meant to be compared to the bees. Such verses are quite common in the Sattasaī and in the Tamil tradition. For example, in verse 366 of the Sattasaī, bees are said to visit the face of the heroine, which is fragrant from her breath. In verse 37 of the same anthology, a *kadamba* tree is said to be taken by the flood of the mountain river, its filaments broken by whirlpools, as the bee clinging there is submerged and appears again. In Tamil a typical poem comparing bees to a male lover is Kuṟuntokai 309:

As part of their work,
farmers leave waterlilies piled high by the edges of their fields,
the redolence of their blossoms spreading
and enticing bees to taste them.
And yet the waterlilies do not say,
"These men are cruel;
we will go to another field to live."
Again they bloom

¹¹ K. KAILASAPATHY in his book *Tamil Heroic Poetry*, London, 1968, attempts to prove that the Sangam poems were oral poetry. I feel that his argument fails because he neglects to take into account the complex and sophisticated nature of the poems. See HART, *The Poems of Ancient Tamil*, pp. 152-158.

in the field from which they were weeded.
 I am like that, lord,
 for though you have done much to hurt me,
 I cannot be without you.

In act four, verse 15 of the *Abhijñānaśākuntalam*, Anasūyā utters a *Māhārāṣṭrī* verse, referring to a female *cakravāka* bird:

Even this one passes the night without her beloved, made longer by separation.
 The web of hope helps to bear the pain of separation even though it is grievous.

To this may be compared *Sattasaī* 252:

O long-eyed one! The long night, enlightened by the moon, somehow passed as if it were 100 *yāmas* long in your absence.

Similarly, in *Sattasaī* 385, the poet says,

‘You will come!’ Thus the first half of the night spent awake passed like a moment.
 The next half seemed a year for her who was overcome by grief.

A Tamil example of this common theme is *Kuṟuntokai* 261, where the heroine says,

Now that the rains have fallen,
 the fruit of the sesame plant is rotten beyond all use
 and is spoiled in these last days of the monsoon
 with their infrequent showers.
 The buffalo dislikes the muddy fields
 and cries out “Ai!” in the thick midnight.
 At this time fear comes,
 and I cannot sleep, friend,
 as I painfully count the time as watchmen do,
 my heart wounded.

The point of these examples is that Kālidāsa knew the *Māhārāṣṭrī* poetic tradition and wrote poems in it. We do not have enough examples of Kālidāsa’s *Māhārāṣṭrī* poems to know whether they are notably closer to the poems of the *Sattasaī* than his other verses (though the examples given above suggest that this may be so).¹² But it is clear that Kālidāsa was intimately familiar with the Maharashtrian tradition. Moreover, it is certain that he did not draw most of the themes his poetry shares with Tamil from the epic tradition, as such themes do not appear there but are found in abundance in the *Sattasaī*, which can be shown to draw from the same Deccani literary tradition as Tamil. Thus an excellent case can be made that Kālidāsa did in fact borrow such themes and techniques from the *Māhārāṣṭrī* poetic tradition, whose literature must have been far more extensive than the few poems which have survived until today. It is also conceivable that Sanskrit predecessors of Kālidāsa, whose works have

¹² In the fourth act of Kālidāsa’s *Vikramorvaśīyam*, there are many *Māhārāṣṭrī* verses that are remarkably similar to the verses of the *Sattasaī*—much more similar, in fact, than Kālidāsa’s Sanskrit verses. Unfortunately, however, it appears almost certain that these verses are interpolations. See *The Vikramorvaśīyam of Kālidāsa*, ed. M. R. KALE, Delhi 1967, pp. 376–377.

been lost, began the fashion of incorporating Māhārāṣṭrī material into Sanskrit. Certainly most classical Sanskrit writers, including even Āsvaghōṣa, used Prakrits and metres which are ultimately Dravidian, and by Kālidāsa's time Māhārāṣṭrī was considered the most poetic of Prakrits. But I feel that it must have been Kālidāsa himself who perfected the new type of poetry and was first able to use the Southern elements in a truly poetic way.

Yet it must be pointed out that Tamil elements appear in Sanskrit even before Kālidāsa. To be sure, only a few such elements appear, and even then only as a shadow of their presence later; but they are there. Such elements include predominantly animal and flower similes. For example, the comparison of a male lover to bees is found in the Vālmiki-Rāmāyaṇa 5.7.35, where women's mouths are said to be surrounded by intoxicated bees which beseech them, and in 5.7.60, where Rāvaṇa's women embracing one another are compared to a garland bound on a string swarming with intoxicated bees. Similarly in Kuṇṭokai 321, the hero is said to wear a chaplet where bees swarm, made from a waterlily which flowered in a spring. In the Vālmiki-Rāmāyaṇa 5.7.44, the women of Rāvaṇa's harem are said to have torn or dirty garlands, like blooming creepers dirtied by elephants in a forest. Similarly, in Kuṇṭokai 112, the heroine says, "Look, friend, like a branch which a great elephant pulled and which hangs without touching the ground, he has eaten my virtue." An example of a shared animal theme is Vālmiki-Rāmāyaṇa 5.23.5, where Sītā surrounded by Rākṣasīs is likened a doe separated from her herd afflicted by wolves. Similarly in Aiṅkuṇūru 354, the hero's compassion in returning soon is evoked by describing the wilderness he crossed as a place where a wild brown dog which has made love to his mate leaves a doe and her fawns without taking them.¹³ It seems to me extremely unlikely that these represent cases in which the Tamil poets copied an earlier Sanskrit epic tradition. Their use in the Tamil poems is too natural and complex to admit of such a simplistic explanation (indeed, their use in Tamil is far more natural than in Sanskrit). Moreover, they are not native to Sanskrit, as they are missing in pre-epic Sanskrit texts. Indeed, it is possible to trace the development of these shared elements in the Indo-Aryan tradition, beginning with the epics. Such a survey throws considerable light on the development of Sanskrit literature.

The Mahābhārata, the earliest of the Sanskrit epics (at least in its most ancient sections) represented something quite new in Sanskrit literature: the preservation of oral bardic material of the sort which Lord has described.¹⁴ For the first time, we possess literature in Sanskrit which was not the property of a small group, but which was intended for a wide audience. And even more important, we possess material whose purpose was not specialized but whose only use was entertainment (at least in the oldest narrative sections). It is

¹³ See HART, *The Poems*, pp. 255-278, for a discussion of Tamil themes found in Indo-Aryan before the Sattasaī.

¹⁴ ALBERT B. LORD, *The Singer of Tales*, Cambridge, Mass. 1964.

natural that in such literature, new and more popular sources should be tapped for such poetic usages as metaphors and conventions. Now the earliest parts of the Mahābhārata are probably not anterior to 200 B.C., while the megalithic culture of the Deccan goes back to at least 800 B.C.¹⁵ It is to be expected that by the time of the Mahābhārata, some of the images and techniques used by the oral bards of the megalithic civilization would have spread into north Indian popular literature to be picked up by the singers of the great epic, especially when one considers that such material is very easily passed over cultural and linguistic boundaries. Thus in the Mahābhārata there are some occurrences of themes ultimately taken from the megalithic culture. What is surprising to me is that such instances are so few and that the use of borrowed similes in the Mahābhārata should be so crude. This suggests that, despite the many occurrences of Dravidian words in the great epic,¹⁶ the influence of the megalithic culture is still remote.

In the Vālmiki-Rāmāyaṇa, borrowed themes become noticeably more common, and the poetic technique changes also, becoming more emotional and more flowery. It seems to me that Vālmiki's Rāmāyaṇa is not an oral epic like the older parts of the Mahābhārata. That is to say, it was probably not extemporized orally in Lord's terms. It lacks the ragged edges of most oral works (especially Indian works), and it does not have the dramatic directness of the Mahābhārata, which seems to have characterized the work of the North Indian bards of the period. Even the hallmarks of oral epics, formulae and themes, do not seem to be present in the Vālmiki-Rāmāyaṇa to the extent that they occur in the Mahābhārata (though a long and difficult analysis would be required to prove this). Rather, it seems to me that the Vālmiki-Rāmāyaṇa is the written work of a literate man who took his story and many of his techniques from oral bards. The author of the Vālmiki-Rāmāyaṇa was pious and wished to stress those elements in his story which would make its relationships and the conduct of its characters ideal. Accordingly he changed the story in some respects (for in an earlier Jātaka version, Rāma and Sītā were brother and sister), and he breathed into it that air of piety, of proper but emotional conduct, of flat but always correct characters, which gave his work its unique flavour. Thus the Vālmiki-Rāmāyaṇa is the first work of Indian literature which is not oral and which is nonetheless for popular enjoyment. Its position as the Ādikāvya is perfectly deserved.

It is important that the Vālmiki-Rāmāyaṇa is the first work of Sanskrit that shows a strong awareness of the South. By the time Vālmiki composed his epic (perhaps the time of Christ), the South was no longer such a remote place as in the early parts of the Mahābhārata and contact between North and South

¹⁵ H. D. SANKALIA, *Beginning of Civilization in South India*, Proceedings of the Second International Conference Seminar of Tamil Studies, Madras, 1971, I, 34-37.

¹⁶ T. BURROW, *The Sanskrit Language*, London 1955, pp. 380-388.

was considerable.¹⁷ Thus elements whose source is the megalithic Deccani civilization, whether literary elements or cultural notions regarding woman and the family, were more present in Vālmiki's new work than in the Mahābhārata.¹⁸ Moreover, Vālmiki found these new literary elements well suited to his purposes. Many of them were metaphors with emotional, and even sentimental, import to be used for describing love between man and woman, and they imparted to the poetry a new gentler tone than the Mahābhārata possessed. Indeed, flower and animal similes were eminently suited to Vālmiki's purposes. I would even argue that Vālmiki's sensibilities were affected by the new South Indian elements and that that is the reason why family relationships take on such strong and sentimental meaning for him.

By the time of Aśvaghōṣa in the first century A.D., southern elements were even more present in North India, and the type of sentimental poem typified by the Vālmiki-Rāmāyaṇa had become popular. It is not surprising to find Aśvaghōṣa using Āryā metre occasionally (which is demonstrably of Dravidian origin) and borrowing even more elements from the South than Vālmiki. But as has been seen above, it was not until Kālidāsa that the southern elements really came into their own in North India. Thus while earlier Sanskrit poets used southern elements which had spread haphazardly into North Indian folk traditions, Kālidāsa seems to have consciously drawn on the Māhārāṣṭrī tradition, which, in spite of its Aryan language, was essentially southern.

One of the more intriguing aspects of the development of the conventions shared by Tamil and Sanskrit is their successive desacralization. In the megalithic culture, the two most important foci of the sacred are the king and woman, especially in her relationship with man. It has been seen that one of the primary functions of the oral bards in the southern culture was to enhance the sacred aura which surrounded the king. This was the purpose of their poems in praise of kings. Even their poems on the love between man and woman had a sacred purpose—to lend an aura of fitness to the home of the couple in which the bard sang, and to reinforce the ideas of the society regarding the sacred relationship between man and woman. Two examples of such themes have already been given: the journey of the hero to bring back wealth before he can marry, and the journey of the hero to visit his beloved secretly before marriage.

In Indo-Aryan these and other themes have been largely divested of their sacred import. The traveller is described in a purely sentimental way, while the man meeting his beloved secretly does so chiefly for the pleasure he will derive from it, the poems containing none of the imagery which turns their Tamil equivalents into journeys through the other world. Two examples from the Subhāṣitaratnakōśa demonstrate this:

¹⁷ Thus Akanāṇṇūru 70 mentions Kōṭi (the Tamil name for Dhanuṣkōṭi), the very tip of the Indian mainland before Adams Bridge, as the place from which Rāma set out for Laṅkā. This passage, which cannot be later than the second or third century A.D., indicates that almost certainly Vālmiki's Laṅkā is Ceylon.

¹⁸ HART, *Woman and the Sacred in Ancient Tamilnad*, op. cit., pp. 247–250.

Though separated by a hundred lands,
by rivers, woods and hills,
and knowing that for all he strives
he cannot see his love;
the traveller stands on tiptoe,
stretching, and with tear-filled eyes
still gazes, lost in thought,
in her direction.¹⁹

The young man at the rendezvous,
well hidden in thick darkness,
casts his vainly opening eyes
to every path of access.
Then at the slightest rustling of the leaves
in error that his mistress has arrived by stealth
he stretches forth his arm, only to be appalled
by its loud breaking of the silence.²⁰

It should, however, be pointed out that in Kālidāsa notions of the sacred which are ultimately derived from the South do occur, but always in conjunction with northern mythology. Thus the Raghuvamśa describes the kings of Raghu's line in terms which would be quite at home in an ancient Tamil poem (but which are foreign to pre-epic Sanskrit literature). In 8.15, for example, the race in which Aja ruled while his father became an ascetic is compared to the sky with the rising sun and the setting moon, while in 11.82 the two Rāmas (Rāma and Paraśurāma) are compared to the sun and the moon at the end of the day after Paraśurāma has been beaten. These may be compared to Puraṇāṇūru 65:

Drums have no mud smeared on them.
Lutes have no *rāgas*.
Large pots have overturned and have no ghee in them.
His retinue no longer drinks liquor swarming with bees.
Ploughmen do not make noise
and the villages with wide streets have no festivals.
Just as on the great day of the full moon
when the two orbs behold one another
and one of them disappears behind the mountain in the evening,
the king of valour,
ashamed at the wound he received in his back
when a king worthy of him aimed at his breast,
is starving himself to death, sitting by his sword.
Daytime when the sun shines
does not pass as days did before.

Here the king is so ashamed of the back wound that he received that he is committing ritual suicide.

There is much other sun imagery as well in the Raghuvamśa. In 1.18, the king is said to take taxes for the good of all as the sun takes water; in 3.37, the king is said to have become irresistible by the help of his prince like the sun

¹⁹ INGALLS, op. cit., poem 765.

²⁰ Ibid., poem 890.

by the help of the autumn season; in 5.13, the poet asks, "How can sorrow befall subjects while you are their king? How can darkness obstruct men's sight while the sun is shining?"; and in 8.30, after fulfilling his three debts, king Aja is compared to the sun unhidden by clouds. To these may be compared *Purāṇānūru* 8:

Kings who protect the world always do him reverence.
Wishing to enjoy the world,
he does not deign to possess it in common with others,
but is always spurred on by the thought that his land is too small.
His spirit is unflagging, his generosity unrestrained,
and his murdering armies are victorious.
How are you like that king Cēralātaṇ,
circle [of the sun] which go high above?
You are limited to the day;
when it is over you show your back and flee.
Your path is inconstant.
And at night you hide yourself within a mountain
after you have illumined the day,
spreading your many rays in the wide sky.

The point of these examples (and many other similar ones could be given) is that both in the Tamil tradition and in Kālidāsa, the king's sacred aura is described in terms of cosmic imagery. These figures and the mentality from which they spring are, I believe, without question indigenous to the megalithic culture of the Deccan. They are not found in pre-epic Sanskrit, or even in epic Sanskrit, except in a very few verses, where they occur in clumsy ways without the grace and fullness which characterize their use in Tamil and Kālidāsa. It is, moreover, in the southern culture that the king was considered the primary focus of the sacred for matters of import to the entire society. Thus in the south, if the king's powers failed it was thought that drought and natural calamity would result. It is entirely natural, then, that the king should be likened to cosmic phenomena, such as the sun and the rains, whose performance was dependent upon his conduct. In the north, on the other hand, the proper order of natural phenomena was long thought to be dependent upon the correct performance of sacrifices and other rites by the Brahmins, not upon the conduct of the kings. Thus in the Vedas and Brāhmaṇas, there are many images comparing cosmic phenomena to the sacrifice, but none that I have been able to find comparing them to the king. Even in Kālidāsa, the southern attitude has not been fully adopted, for the kings he describes are not real but mythological. In later Sanskrit, verses of cosmic imagery were used to describe human kings, as in Tamil:

I wonder how these solar rays
which dry the deepest lake till only mud is left
have been defeated in their work of stanching
the teardrops of the women of your foes.²¹

²¹ Ibid., poem 1424.

Verses using cosmic and natural imagery with sacred import to describe love are found in the Kumārasaṃbhava. Unlike Tamil, however, it is the heroine Pārvaṭī who experiences sacred fulfilment from union with the hero Śiva, not the other way around. For example, in 5.61, Pārvaṭī's female friend says to an ascetic that she does not know when Śiva will come to Pārvaṭī, like Indra (i.e., rain) to ploughed land suffering from drought. To this may be compared Kuṛuntokai 131, where the hero says,

Her large eyes seem placed on her face.
Her round arms are as lovely as swaying bamboo.
The town she lives in lies across long spaces
and my heart,
like a farmer with only one plough
when his fertile field is wet and ready,
hurries frantically.
What shall I do ?

In the Kumārasaṃbhava, at the marriage of Śiva and Pārvaṭī, after Pārvaṭī has bathed and put on wedding clothes she is said to have shone like the earth after being soaked by rain, blooming with *kāśa*. Then in book eight of the Kumārasaṃbhava, there is detailed description of the loveplay between Śiva and Pārvaṭī after they have been married. To this may be compared Akanāṇūru 136, where the hero remembers his wedding :

With unrestrained generosity they honoured eminent guests,
serving them rice flowing with ghee and filled with faultless meat.
As omens fell together favourably
and the vast sky shone with clear light,
and as there was an unjeopardized conjunction of the moon and *cakaṭam*,
they readied the marriage house and worshipped the god.
Then as the great kettle drum roared with the loud marriage drum
and the girls who had washed her for marriage
looked, their flower eyes unwinking,
and then quickly hid themselves,
her relatives put on her a white thread
with fragrant cool buds brought forth in the first rain by **roaring clouds**
from *arukai*, a tuber with black petals like polished sapphires
spread in valleys where almost-grown calves graze
on the forked, dull-backed leaves of soft-flowered *vākai*.
And they made her resplendent with pure garments.
Then they came arousing my desire
and they gave her to me lovely with ornaments
and wiped off her sweat
in that pandal where the sound of marriage was like **rain**.
That night she, her chastity perfect,
as close to me as my body to my life,
covered herself entirely with her still fresh garment.
I said, "Open it just a little
so the strong wind can dispel the sweat
breaking out on your hot, crescent-moon forehead,"
and, my heart full of desire, I ripped off her garment.
Her form exposed shone like an unsheathed sword,

and she, not knowing how to hide herself,
 took off the colourful garland of lilies holding **her hair**
 and hid the private parts of her body
 with the darkness of her thick black tresses
 full of flowers and humming with bees,
 and, ashamed, begged and pleaded with me.

In these love poems, both Sanskrit and Tamil, natural and cosmic phenomena are used as similes for the state of union. In both the purpose is to express the sacred nature of the experience, to communicate that just as the earth is useless without rain, so are the lives of man and woman useless without their union. This attitude towards fertility explains why in both traditions the description or suggestion of erotic conduct on the part of the couple is deemed proper even in poems which are self-consciously religious.

One of the most important elements in ancient Tamil society is fitness. The king must be fit to rule, and his fitness must constantly be reinforced and recreated. A woman must be fit for being married: she must wear the proper ornaments, marks, and flowers. Notions of fitness apply equally to the men whose function is to control the sacred and to create fitness for others—the oral bards and others of low caste. Thus each low caste has its own drum and musical instruments which the other castes should not play. And in the literature composed by the oral bards, fitness occupies a pre-eminent place. The categories of love and heroic poetry (*akam* and *puram*) are both divided into five major divisions, each with its own subject, its own *rāga*, and a proper time of day to be sung. And each subject has its own special flora and fauna, its own season, its own time of day.

It seems to me that the southern influence on northern culture can be seen as a process of southern notions of fitness being adopted. In northern music, *rāgas* appear at about the time of Christ. In literature, notions of *rasa* appear at about the same time. The monsoon comes to be seen as a time to describe the separation of lovers; conventional lovers' situations become very common. But more important, in the centuries after Christ the whole approach to the world in North India, which of course has influenced its literature profoundly, comes to be dominated by ultimately southern notions of fitness. In the Vālmiki-Rāmāyaṇa, the proper or fit role of each member of the family is delineated; in the Kumārasaṃbhava and the Meghadūta, the ideally fit relationship between man and woman is depicted. Indeed, ideas of fitness become so strong that literature itself becomes convention-bound in the centuries after Kālidāsa. A *kāvya* or a play must have just so many parts and so many elements. It is this sort of categorization, of notion that each human undertaking must proceed in a proper and prescribed way, that characterizes most strongly medieval India.

No doubt some part of this mentality proceeds from the earliest Aryan times, where since the Brāhmaṇas the sacrifice had to be conducted with the minutest attention to detail, and where since the Vedas themselves the verbal formula,

or *brahman*, had been thought to have potency such that it underlay the structure of the entire universe. But the special notions of fitness under discussion here, fitness as it relates to everyday life, to family relationships, to poetry, and to music, are missing in the early Aryan sources. The Vedic hymns and the Brāhmaṇas lack the tight, perfectly formed structure of the early Tamil poems. They are not intended to be sung at a certain time of day to a certain *rāga*. Rather, they are intended for special ritual occasions, when transcendent gods are summoned and invoked, not for the everyday use to which the Tamil poems were put in order to create a climate of fitness and order and to keep immanent sacred forces under control.

The idea of fitness that begins to be found in North India at the time of Christ and that characterizes medieval India so strongly conforms to the southern pattern, not to the Vedic one. A woman must be chaste all of the time, not merely for important rituals.²² A widow must practice self-mortification for the rest of her life, not merely undergo a period of ritual mourning. One's house and surroundings must be kept in a condition of fitness, free from pollution, all of the time. One must perform virtually every important action, from waking and performing morning ablutions to going to sleep, in the proper, fit circumstances. And with regard to artistic endeavour, every creation must conform to certain conventionalized standards. Medieval Hindu art perpetuated ideals found in the earliest Tamil sources: that art is ultimately an expression of religious modality, that works of art must conform to certain detailed criteria so as to possess the fitness which really makes them works of art, and that the king's sacred status means that he must support the arts (and that the worth and fitness of a king is judged to a significant extent by the works of art that he has fostered). It is ironic that notions of fitness were carried to extremes in Sanskrit, ultimately a northern language, whose medieval literature became so convention-ridden as to be forbidding to most *rasikas*. The living languages of India, such as Tamil, while they did keep notions of fitness and conventions, were continually nourished by living folk traditions and so never became so convention-ridden as Sanskrit.²³

²² On the other hand, the Vedic ceremony of Varuṇapraghāsa, at which the wife of the sacrificer must indicate the number of lovers that she has, shows how different the attitude of the Vedic culture was from the megalithic one described in the Tamil poems.

²³ See also S. LIENHARD, in Vol. E. Stuszkiewicz, Warsaw 1974, p. 137.

II

LATER TAMIL, OTHER DRAVIDIAN LANGUAGES, AND SANSKRIT

The relationship between Indo-Aryan and Dravidian continues, of course, far past the ancient times that have been discussed above. Here, it will be possible to suggest only a few aspects of that relationship, as it is on the whole an uncharted area.

It has been common in the past to discuss old Kannada, Telugu, and Malayalam literatures as if they were little more than branches of Sanskrit literature that happen to have been translated into Dravidian languages. Many have suggested that while Tamil may contain original features that it did not derive from and does not share with Sanskrit, the same is not true of the other Dravidian literatures. They have contended that there is no characteristic "Dravidian" quality that these literatures share with one another but not with Sanskrit.¹

In my opinion, this view is incorrect. It is true that there are some Dravidian works, such as Nannaiya's Telugu version of part of the Mahābhārata, that contain little not taken from Sanskrit. However, all the Dravidian languages possess works that owe little to Sanskrit, such as the Kannada Vacanas and the Telugu epic Palnāṭivīracaritra. These works share features that are found also in Tamil. In order to throw some light on features shared by Dravidian literatures, I have discussed both of these works below.

The Kannada Vacanas, some of which have recently been translated very well by A. K. Ramanujan,² are free-verse poems by Viraśaiva poets addressed to Śiva and composed mostly between the tenth and twelfth centuries A. D. While they use some Sanskrit words, there is no Sanskrit genre that they imitate; rather, they represent attempts by the writers to break free of Sanskrit molds to appeal to a general public of Kannada speakers. In order to do this, the poets had to tap a sensibility and a tradition that had existed in the countryside from a time before the influence of Sanskrit became important. The cultural tradition to which they turned was simply the continuation of the old megalithic culture of South India. As a result, their poems share certain features with the Tamil *sangam* poems of eight hundred years earlier. These include many images and conventions; but most importantly, they include a characteristic approach to poetry emphasizing suggestion and concrete, everyday imagery. For example, Ramanujan translates a poem of Mahādēviyakka as follows:

Listen, sister, listen.

I had a dream.

I saw rice, betel, palmleaf
and coconut.

¹ KAMIL ZVELEBIL, *The Smile of Murugan: On Tamil Literature of South India*, Leiden 1973, pp. 1-8.

² A. K. RAMANUJAN, *Speaking of Siva*, Baltimore, Md., 1973.

I saw an ascetic
come to beg,
white teeth and small matted curls.

I followed on his heels
and held his hand,
he who goes breaking
all bounds and beyond.

I saw the lord, white as jasmine,
and woke wide open.³

Here the poetess uses a convention that goes back to the time of the megalithic culture: the woman who dreams happily of her lover and then awakens to reality. To this may be compared Kuruntokai 147, in which the hero speaks:

Like bent *pāṭiri* flowers in summer,
her blackness shines, the hair on her belly erect,
her ornaments sublime.
You seemed to give her to me,
but then woke me from my sleep, dream.
Yet they do not despise you
who have left their beloved.

The point of similarity between these two poems is not simply a shared theme; after all, that can be found in Sanskrit also (having been borrowed by that tradition from the South through *Māhārāṣṭrī*). Rather, in both poems there is an economy of expression and a use of suggestion that are alien to Sanskrit. The beloved is described with a few well-chosen phrases that have an erotic effect. In both, the dream of the beloved has a profound and mystical effect: in the Kannada verse, it enables the poet to transcend the world and see reality as it really is; in the Tamil poem, it makes the hero able to proceed on his journey through the wilderness. Both poems read carefully reveal a sensibility and an approach to sacred experience that is native to South India. They both contain characteristic South Indian use of imagery and of paradox. It would take much more space to document these similarities satisfactorily; yet these examples give a notion of how the Dravidian literatures share a literary sensibility.

The Telugu *Palnāṭivīracaritra* concerns the story of the king of *Palnāḍu*, an area in Andhra Pradesh. It is supposed to have been written by Śrīnātha in the fifteenth century. While it does use Sanskrit words to some extent, it is not in any way derived from a Sanskrit genre. Rather, it is a literary retelling of an oral folk tale that is still being sung by the low-caste bards of Andhra Pradesh.⁴ As such, it represents a purely Dravidian story narrated with Dravidian techniques and conventions that go back in a continuous line to the megalithic culture of the first millenium B. C. and to the oral literary traditions of that

³ Ibid., p. 124.

⁴ This fascinating work will be translated, analyzed, and compared with current oral versions by Gene Roghair in his doctoral dissertation submitted to the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

culture of which the lowest castes were the custodians. These Dravidian elements may have been embellished here and there by fancy words and even conventions taken from Sanskrit, but the work as a whole is quite alien to the Sanskrit tradition.

The foregoing suggests that the Deccani megalithic culture from which the cultures of South India (and to some extent also of Orissa and Maharashtra) arose did not wholly die or become assimilated by the Sanskritic culture as it became popular in the South. It would be more correct to say that the two traditions existed side by side in South India, influencing one another but never wholly merging. Thus we find works in all the Southern languages, as well as in Sanskrit, that are predominantly Dravidian and go back to the Deccani oral literature side by side with works that are more northern in their orientation and that contain few Southern elements. My own experience has been that the former type of works are much more common in South India, and that few literary (as opposed to philosophical) works have been composed in the Dravidian languages and in Sanskrit in the South that owe little to the native Dravidian tradition. It is true that stories were often taken from Sanskrit sources; but the way in which these stories were treated in South India was usually characteristically Dravidian, with elements that fit into the indigenous culture being emphasized.⁵ Indeed, most Southern retellings of Northern stories relied to a considerable extent on Southern folk versions that not only imparted a particular Southern flavour to the stories, but that often added whole new episodes in the Southern languages.

It is clear that much could be written on each of the Southern literatures—indeed, on each major work—and their indebtedness or lack thereof to Sanskrit. What is germane here is the particular case of post-Sangam Tamil and the way in which it was influenced by Sanskrit. This is a complex subject on which very little research has been carried out. Below, I have indicated some of the ways in which some major works and genres of Tamil literature are indebted to Sanskrit, and some of the ways in which they are different. On the whole, I find it impossible not to be struck by the differences between Sanskrit and Tamil through their entire histories.

The first literary works of importance in Tamil after the anthologies and the Pattuppāṭṭu are the eighteen minor works, written perhaps in the fourth and fifth centuries A. D. and consisting of short verses on ethical and *akam* themes. The most noteworthy in my opinion are the ethical works, especially the *Nālaṭiṭṭi* and the *Tirukkuraḷ*. Without question, these works share some features with Sanskrit ethical works that are probably earlier—especially some of their general ideas on the nature of the state.⁶ But they contain an earthiness combined with sophistication that is characteristic of early Tamil and foreign to San-

⁵ For example, in the *Kaṃparāmāyaṇam*, Rāvaṇa never actually touches Sītā.

⁶ Earlier Sanskrit works in which some of the ideas of Tiruvalluvar on the nature of the state appear are the *Arthaśāstra* and the *Śukranīti*.

skrit. Indeed, Sanskrit ethical poems are for the most part not great literature, unlike the best of their Tamil counterparts. In the finest of the Tamil poems, each word is perfectly chosen and perfectly related to the others, and the figures are carefully selected, so that, in the words of the fifth verse of the *Tiruvalluvmālai*,

Like a drop on a tiny blade of grass,
smaller in extent than a millet grain
reflecting the full measure of a towering palmyra,
O lord of a rich land
where pet birds sleep to songs of women pounding mortars,
is the breadth of the clear *kuraḷ* verses of Vaḷḷuvar.⁷

Of the Nālaṭiṃyār Pope has written, "If I am not deceived there is in many of these verses something far beyond mere technical skill. At times by a few happy touches an idea is expressed in such apt languages, and illuminated by such a picturesque use and adaptation of familiar words, each chosen with truest and most accurate discrimination, that the quatrain becomes a group of life-like pictures, on which the mind is fain to linger long, and to which it recurs often . . ."⁸ An example is verse 24 of the Nālaṭiṃyār: "They march and then strike once! A little while they wait, then strike the drum a second time. Behold, how fine! The third stroke sounds. They veil it, take the fire, and go forth: —the dying bear the dead!"⁹

In the *Tirukkuraḷ*, the approach to life is typically Tamil, even though some elements have been appropriated from the North. Thus the work is arranged according to the Sanskrit *trivarga* of human concerns: *dharma* (*aṛam*), *artha* (*poruḷ*), and *kāma* (*iṇṇam*). These are difficult to render into English; perhaps the best equivalents would be general morality, wordly conduct and advancement, and sexual pleasure. What distinguishes the *Tirukkuraḷ* in my view is its emphasis on family life and human intercourse. It is true that it contains sections on the life of a ascetic; but *Tiruvalluvar* is most moving and seems most at home when he discusses such themes as the excellence of a wife, the excellence of children, and forgiving others. In this regard the *Tirukkuraḷ* contrasts vividly with the most venerated Sanskrit work on proper conduct, the *Bhagavadgītā*, which stresses self-discipline and the renunciation of desire, but does not deal with such subjects as forbearance, ingratitude, love, generosity, children, and learning. It is for this reason that the *Tirukkuraḷ* and the entire Tamil tradition that it epitomizes have seemed on the whole more sympathetic to such representatives of the Judeo-Christian tradition as Pope and Schweitzer than the *Bhagavadgītā*. It should be added that the *Tirukkuraḷ* contains sections on almost every conceivable area of human endeavour, from medicine and the

⁷ *Tiruvalluvmālai*, with commentary by U. V. M. KŌPĀLAKRUṢṢAMĀCĀRYAR, Madras 1965, p. 3.

⁸ Naladiyar with translations in English by G. U. POPE and F. W. ELLIS, Madras 1963, p. xix.

⁹ This is Pope's translation; *ibid.*, p. 13 (verse 24).

rains to how to win a woman's heart. Some of these sections, for example those on politics and those on not eating meat, point to Northern sources. Others, such as those on ethical themes, family life, and love between man and woman are shared with earlier Tamil literature and do not appear to be taken from the North at all. But the entire tenor of the work is undeniably Tamil; even the sections on politics have leavened Northern ideas with the indigenous Tamil conception of the king as a centre of sacred power and as a spiritual figure to whom all his subjects look. Moreover, the metre of the *Tirukkuraḷ* is extremely short and elegant, quite unlike anything in Sanskrit, lending itself to short, epigrammatic formulations. Thus the *Tirukkuraḷ*—along with the *Nāḷaṭiyār*, which must be about contemporary with it—is the first of many Tamil works that take a few Sanskritic elements, combine them with indigenous elements, and treat them in a characteristically Tamil way to produce a work whose general tenor is Tamil. In terms of diction, the result is the same sort of earthiness combined with terseness that characterizes the *Nāḷaṭiyār* and the short poems of the Sangam anthologies. For example, verse 77:

As the sun a creature that has no bones
righteousness burns the loveless.

Or verse 402:

The unlearned desiring to speak
are like a person without two breasts desiring to be a woman.

The next important work in Tamil is the *Cilappatikāram*, an epic written in the fifth or sixth century A. D. This work, certainly, must have been adapted from an oral tale that was sung by the low castes, much as it is sung even today, and as such works as the *Palnāṭivīracaritra* are sung. Its story is characteristically Tamil, concerning the unjust widowing of Kaṇṇaki and the subsequent power of her chastity, which consumes the city of Madurai. I have written on this at length elsewhere, showing that the story, which is not found in any Aryan language of premodern India, makes exemplary use of Tamil ideas regarding the king and woman.¹⁰ However, Iḷaṅkō, the author who adapted the work from its oral versions, was a Jain. Accordingly, he infused his creation with Jain doctrine, specifically, with a belief in the power of *karma*. The result is, in my opinion, disastrous. The parts of the work that describe the tragedy of Kōvalaṅ's death and Kaṇṇaki's subsequent rage are, at their best, sublime. But the effect is spoiled time and time again when Iḷaṅkō attributes their fate to actions in former births and then has Kaṇṇaki bodily assumed into heaven where she rejoins her husband. It is possible that I am simply reacting in a Western way, with my acquired views as to the sublimity of tragedy influencing me; yet I cannot help feeling that a Sangam poet would have reacted much as I do. Thus in *Puṛaṇāṇūru* 134, the poet Uṛaiyūr Ēṇicēri Muṭamōciyār sings the king Vēḷ Āy Aṇṭiraṇ:

¹⁰ GEORGE L. HART, *The Poems of Ancient Tamil: Their Milieu and Their Sanskrit Counterparts*, Berkeley, California 1975, pp. 104–107.

Āy is no dealer in the commodity of virtue,
 thinking the acts of this birth will help in the next.
 No, but because it is the way good men have gone,
 he gives following their example.

In any event, we know that *karma* was not a native Tamil notion,¹¹ and that it must have been missing in the original oral version of the poem. I cannot help feeling that Ṭaṅkō's version is probably inferior to the oral version that he copied. It is interesting to note that the doctrine of *karma* need not be treated in the unimaginative way that Ṭaṅkō has incorporated it into his work. A Sangam poet, Kaṇiyaṇ Pūṅkuṇraṇ, has described *karma* in profound terms in Puṇaṇāṇūru 192. For him, *karma* is not a formula whereby one action inevitably leads to a fixed retribution. Rather, it is a mysterious process whose workings are hidden and to which man can best respond by the act of compassion:

All lands home, all men kin.
 Evil and good are not from others,
 nor are pain and its abating.
 Death is not new,
 and we do not rejoice thinking life is sweet.
 If there is something hateful,
 even less do we find it cause for grief.
 Through the vision of the able ones
 we have come to know that hard life takes its course
 as if it were a raft upon the waters of a mighty river
 roaring as it ever flows on rocks,
 swollen because cold drops pour from flashing skies,
 and so we do not wonder at those big with greatness
 and still less do we despise the small.

After the Cilappatikāram, there are many important Tamil works, including the Maṇimēkalai, the Cīvakaśintāmaṇi, the devotional songs of the Nāyaṇmārs and the Ālvārs, and the narrations of mythological stories. This literature can be divided roughly into two genres (though there are other genres of importance as well): the devotional songs, which are mostly short verses not related in a narrative way, and longer *kāvya*-type poems on mythological themes.

The devotional songs of Tamil are quite unlike anything preceding them in Sanskrit, even though they are mostly addressed to gods of Northern provenance. They are characterized by their emotional approach to worship, and by their consciousness of sin and guilt. In verse 31 of the *Tiruccatakam*, Māṇikavācakar sings:

You did not dance.
 You had no love for the feet of him who dances [Śiva].
 Your bones melting, you did not sing.
 You did not feel anguished.
 You did not humble yourself.
 You did not put on yourself his flowerlike foot,
 nor did you adorn it.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 67-69.

O corpse of a heart, who have no one to help you,
 You did not search for him.
 You did not wander every street.
 I do not know what to do.

Tirunāvukkaracu sings,

My clan is evil, my qualities are evil, my intentions are evil; I am big only in sin; I am evil [because I have not] the good, which is beautiful; I am evil, I am not one who knows, I did not consort with the good. . .¹²

These verses—and there are hundreds of thousands of similar ones—show a consciousness quite alien to early Sanskrit religious literature, where emphasis is on discipline and control.¹³ Indeed, when the Bhagavadgītā mentions *bhakti*, it means a disciplined devotion unfraught with feelings of guilt and inadequacy. The Tamil verses, on the other hand, idealize violent and intense emotional involvement with a personal god, accompanied by a sense of wretchedness and repentance. In later times, the Tamil ideal came to an extent into Sanskrit, and one finds emotional worship depicted in the Bhāgavatapurāṇa and a sense of sin in many *stotras* (which were mostly written in South India). Never, however, have I found the intensity of Tamil devotion in Sanskrit. It would be unthinkable for a Sanskrit poet, for example, to describe as Kampan does men decapitating themselves and tearing out their eyes when they learn Rāma has left Ayodhyā for the forest.¹⁴

Side by side with this devotional literature of short verses there exists in Tamil a large number of long poems on mythological subjects. Most of these works are called *purāṇas* in Tamil, but this is quite misleading. The Sanskrit *purāṇas* are for the most part unpolished works consisting of verses in the *śloka* meter that have all the hallmarks of oral verse—many formulae, themes, lack of enjambement.¹⁵ The Tamil mythological poems, on the other hand, are complex and highly sophisticated. They resemble Sanskrit *kāvya*s, not *purāṇas*; indeed, if one speaks of *kāvya* as a genre, Tamil possesses many more *kāvya*s than Sanskrit.

The most famous of these works—and among the best of them—is the Kamparāmāyaṇam, a Tamil version of the Rāmāyaṇa in over 10,000 difficult verses written in the ninth or twelfth century A. D. by Kampan. In order to

¹² Tirunāvukkaracu Cuvāmikaḷ, Tēvāram (Śrīvaikuṇṭham, Śrī Kumarakuruparaṇ Caṅkam, 1961), p. 621.

¹³ In chapter 1, section 3 of her forthcoming book, *The Origins of Evil in Hindu Mythology* (Berkeley, California 1976), WENDY O'FLAHERTY writes, "There are some striking exceptional examples of a true sense of sin and repentance in Hinduism: some Rig-Vedic hymns to Varuṇa, some poems of Tamil Saivism, and a [Sanskrit] verse still recited by many sophisticated Hindus today: 'Evil am I, evil are my deeds.' But these are outweighed a thousandfold by instances of sin regarded as the fault of God or nature. Evil is not primarily what we do; it is what we do not wish to have done to us. That evil that we do commit is the result of delusion (*moha*) or deception (*māyā*); and it is God who creates these delusions and deceptions."

¹⁴ Kampan Iyarriya Irāmāyaṇam, Ayottiyā Kāṇṭam, part 1, Annamalai 1959, verse 1868.

¹⁵ See ALBERT B. LORD, *The Singer of Tales*, Cambridge 1964.

give a notion of the difference between the Rāmāyaṇas of Kampan and Vālmiki, I have translated below some verses from the section where Bharata returns home to Ayodhyā to find that in his absence his mother, Kaikeyī, has had his brother Rāma exiled so that Bharata may become king and that Daśaratha has died from grief. Vālmiki begins the scene as follows:

Then not seeing his father there in the palace,
Bharata went to see his mother in her rooms.
When she saw that her son, who had been away, had come,
Kaikeyī jumped up happily, leaving her golden seat.
And he, the righteous one, entered his own house devoid of its splendour,
and, seeing her, Bharata took hold of his mother's auspicious feet.¹⁶

Kampan writes:

At that time the axled chariot,
as swift as thought,
reached the high, blessed threshold of the palace
and the emperor's son came to where his father stayed.

With love he came,
and when he failed to see the king, skilled in battle,
then he whose shoulders are lofty as mountains felt doubt,
thinking, "This is no small thing."

As he went searching for his elder brother
to make obeisance to him with his pure hands,
a woman approached, her arms as supple as bamboo, and said,
"Your mother calls you. Come."¹⁷

In the first verse, Kampan suggests that the thoughts of Bharata have been on meeting his father as he returned in the chariot. In the third, he contrasts skillfully the straightforward nature of Bharata, who has pure hands, and the crooked nature of his mother, to whom he is summoned by a woman with supple arms. In Vālmiki, Bharata searches out his mother upon not finding his father. But in Kampan, Bharata searches for his elder brother, Rāma; he goes to his mother only because he is summoned. Clearly, Kampan's approach is more consistent with what comes later (when Bharata describes how much Rāma means to him), and it is more dramatic. Like Sanskrit *kāvya* verses, each verse has much more in it in Kampan than in Vālmiki. Then Kaikeyī tells Bharata that his father, Daśaratha, has died. In Vālmiki,

When he heard those words, Bharata, righteous, noble, pure,
fell suddenly to the earth, tormented by the force of his sorrow for his father.
Then, full of sorrow, grieving at his father's death,
he, of great splendour, lamented, his wits distracted.
"This bed of my father seemed very lovely before,
but now, without him, it has lost its splendour."¹⁸

¹⁶ The Vālmiki-Rāmāyaṇa, critically edited by G. H. BHATT et al., Ayodhyā Kāṇḍam, Baroda 1962, 2, 66, 1-3.

¹⁷ Kampan Iyarriya Irāmāyaṇam, Ayottiyā Kāṇḍam, part 2, Annamalai 1962, verses 2229-2231.

¹⁸ The Vālmiki-Rāmāyaṇa, op. cit., 2, 66, 15-17.

In Kampan, this becomes much longer, as the poet adds a section in which Bharata addresses his dead father:

When these cruel words hurled by his mother reached his ear,
his great height fell, his curly hair disheveled,
and he lost awareness and did not breathe
as if a lofty banyan tree broken by lightning were brought to earth.

His mouth shone no longer with its smile,
and his eyes, like blooming lotuses, flowed with water.
“What wife but you would dare utter such inauspicious words
like fire thrown in someone’s ear?”

As handsome as Murugan, he rose, he grieved,
then he fell again, and wept, and sighed.
He was desolate, he cried out,
and said these words.

“You have cut the root of virtue, you have killed compassion,
you have destroyed the light of your own mercy by your dying.
My lord, you have turned your back on justice.
What greater sin than this could you incur?”¹⁹

He continues in this fashion for eight more verses. Then, in Vālmīki, Bharata says,

“He who is my brother, my father, my friend, whose servant I am—
quickly tell to him, Rāma, the intelligent, that I am come.
For the elder brother is the father. I will take refuge
at the feet of him, who knows *dharma*. He now is my refuge.
What did the king, my father, of true valour, say to that noble one [Rāma]?
I wish to hear his last excellent communication for myself.”

Thus asked, Kaikeyī spoke truthfully:
“Crying out, ‘Rāma!’ and ‘Sītā, Lakṣmaṇa!’
that great soul went to the other world, he who is the best of refuges.
And your father said these last words,
caught by the inevitability of Death, like a great elephant caught in a noose:
‘Men, their desires fulfilled, will see Rāma returned
with Sītā and Lakṣmaṇa, the great-armed one.’”

When he heard that, he was downcast at that second telling of bad news,
and, his face turned down, he asked his mother again:

“Where is he, the virtuous one, now, he who is the son of Kausalyā?
Where has he gone with his brother Lakṣmaṇa and with Sītā?”

Asked in this way, she began to tell the truth,
saying all the dreadful story at once, thinking it would please her son.

“That king’s son, my son, has gone to the great forest of Daṇḍaka
with Vaidehī and Lakṣmaṇa, wearing a tattered garment.”

When he heard that, Bharata fell down, and, wondering whether his brother
had done wrong, began to ask, impelled by the greatness of his lineage:

“Could the money of some Brahmin have been taken by Rāma?
Could he, devoid of sin, have harmed some rich person or poor person?
Could he have desired another’s wife?

Why was he sent to the forest, like a Brahmin killer?”

¹⁹ Kampan, op. cit., 2235–2238.

Then his fickle mother, with her womanly nature,
 began to tell her own deed as it happened:
 "No Brahmin's money was taken by Rāma;
 no person rich or poor was harmed by him, sinless;
 and Rāma does not even look at the wives of others with his eyes.
 But when I heard of the coronation of Rāma, son,
 I asked your father for the kingdom for you and for Rāma's exile.
 And your father, steeling himself, did as I had asked.
 And Rāma with Lakṣmaṇa and Sītā was exiled.
 And the king, the renowned one, not seeing his dear son,
 grieving with sorrow for his son, died.
 Now you, knower of justice, should become king;
 for it was for you that all this was done.
 Therefore, son, quickly surrounded by Vasiṣṭha and the other Brahmins
 who know the rite, have yourself consecrated king."²⁰

In Kampan, this incident has a far more powerful dramatic intensity, as it builds almost as if written in accordance with Aristotle to Kaikeyī's revelation of the truth, which is masterfully put into one verse. I begin with the last verse Bharata addresses to his dead father:

"You will not get to see with eyes large from pride
 the coronation of Rāma as king
 after you give the whole earth to that son
 who was so hard to get."

Inconsolable, he spoke these words and wept, his eyes welling water.
 As he grieved, his mother comforted him,
 and when his grief had abated,
 like Death, holding his well-made bow, he spoke:

"Rāma, whose virtue has no end,
 is my father, my mother, my lord, and my brother.
 Unless I bow before his feet,
 my grief and remorse will not be assuaged."

She heard this, and, not hesitating to utter words
 as unfeeling as strokes of lightning, she spoke again:

"Listen, O you whose bow kills enemies.
 Rāma is in the forest with his wife and brother."

As what she had said penetrated his mind
 and he realized that Rāma had gone to the forest,
 he was silent as if he had eaten fire, and he wondered
 what more fate could inflict on him, what misfortunes remained to be heard.

Filled with anxiety, he said,

"You say that he who wears rings on his feet has gone to the forest.
 Did he do something wrong? Is a god angry with him?
 Or was it fate, the strongest of things? Why did he go?"

"If Rāma did something wrong, he must have done so
 as a mother punishes her son, to guide those who live in this realm.
 Did he go after our father died or before?
 Tell me," he said.

²⁰ The Vālmiki-Rāmāyaṇa, op. cit., 2, 66, 26-45.

"It was not because he insulted his elders,
not because he was arrogant, not because of a god.
And he went to the forest while his father,
king of kings who shone like the sun, was still alive," she answered.

"If he has committed no fault,
if no enemies pursue him enraged, if no god is angered,
then why should a son enter the forest while his father lives ?
And why afterwards should the father die ?" he asked.

"From your father I received two boons.
With one I banished his son, and with the other I made the earth yours.
Because he could not bear that,
the king with his wheel of law left this life," she said.²¹

Hereupon, in both versions Bharata becomes angry with his mother. In Vālmiki, he is motivated with little other than anger towards her:

But when he heard that his father had died, and his brother were exiled,
Bharata, afflicted by grief, said these words:
"What will I, struck down, do grieving with a kingdom
deprived of my father and my brother, who is like a father ?
You have inflicted misery upon misery on me. It is as if
you put pepper in a wound in that you made my father dead and made Rāma an
You would destroy our line, like the night of Death come. ascetic.
My father did not understand that in keeping you, he kept charcoal."²²

Bharata continues for some time in this vein in Vālmiki. In Kampaṇ, however, his feelings are far more complex: he is not just a flat character angry at his mother, but rather his emotions display the ambivalence that would seem natural to someone in his position so that he finally cries out that he has killed his own father. Moreover, Kampaṇ has introduced Bharata's speech with a beautiful description of his anger, using cosmic imagery that goes all the way back to Sangam literature, where it is used for the king:

Before she had finished speaking,
his hands, joined in obeisance like flowers on his head, covered his ears.
His eyebrows began to dance up and down, flashes of fire
ran with his breaths, and his eyes filled with blood.

His cheeks twitched; all his pores seemed to explode in flame.
Smoke seemed to cover him; his mouth grew wrinkled;
and his long hands, as generous as clouds, struck one against the other,
breaking the earth and making thunder afraid.

With each movement of his feet the earth and Mount Mēru
became like a ship carrying an elephant,
its solitary mast, the first thing seen in the distance, towering incomparably high,
as a swirling wind takes it so it struggles on the flooding sea.

The gods were terrified; the demons perished from fright.
The many pores that stream rut of the elephants of the directions
closed up. Night returned,
and even Death covered his eyes.

²¹ Kampaṇ, op. cit., 2246-2255.

²² The Vālmiki-Rāmāyaṇa, op. cit., 2, 67, 1-4.

Like an enraged lion in his cruel anger,
he did not think the merciless woman before him his mother,
but stood fearing his great brother would despise him.
And he spoke strong words like the falling of thunder.

“My father has died and my brother has become an ascetic
through your vicious scheming, and yet I do not tear out your mouth.
No, I stand here even though I heard your words,
for I in my greed would rule the kingdom, would I not ?

“Though I stand here, you still remain alive.
I should have killed you before I said one word.
Indeed, if I did not fear my brother’s anger,
the name ‘mother’ would not have stood in my way.

“At your vicious behest, a king has died and a great man has been exiled.
And here is a Bharata to rule the land in his greed.
Certainly this accords with the path of justice;
what wrong is there in this ?

“People will say, ‘Through the scheming of his two-faced mother,
Bharata destroyed his lineage that has come from ancient times
and brought on it reproach.’
What could be more excellent than this ?

“You lived here like a snake that bites.
You utterly transgressed the bounds of chastity,
cut off at the root the king who kept you in his house, his spear sharpened
by a deadly file. Now that you have taken this boon, what will you take next ?

“You feel no remorse though you devoured your husband’s life.
Demonness! You do not die, yet by what right do you live ?
You gave me undying reproach and you gave me your breast.
Are you a mother ? What more will you give me ?”²³

Then, after a few verses in which he considers Rāma’s reasons for doing what
Kaikeyī has asked, Bharata continues:

“I will live a life of leisure. He who was born before me
eats tasteless leaves from the palm of his hand while I, unfeeling,
eat from lovely vessels fine rice, like ambrosia, with ghee.
Will they who see this not reproach me ?

“The very day he heard that he who carries a bow on his shoulders
has gone to the hot forest, my good father died.
And yet I do not kill her who is like poison and I do not die myself.
Am I not blameless ? I even weep as if I had love for my father and brother.

“The people of the world will not accept me as king, nor will I accept censure
because I am attached to life. Yet my blame will never be erased,
and the goddess of good fortune will never stay in this city.
Tell me, with whom did you conceive your plan ? Whose advice did you take ?
See what you have brought to pass, encompassing the destruction of right ?

“Through your murderous mouth I killed my father
and I banished my brother to the forest. Now I remain to rule the world.
If this be so, is the blame yours ? Is it yours ?
Never will there come a time when my blame is erased . . .

²³ Kampar, op. cit., 2256–2266.

“Willingly I stayed in the hell of your womb.
Now to cleanse myself from that sin and to assuage my anguish,
with Justice itself as witness and the three worlds as onlookers,
I will become an ascetic.

“I will give you the counsel of the righteous:
if you will give up this life to which you are so attached,
you will show that you did your deeds with no premeditation,
you will become pure,
and you will receive the merit of having been born on earth.
Except for that, there is no other way,” he said.²⁴

The episode as portrayed by Kampan cannot help but call to mind Sophocles’ Oedipus the King: Bharata, in ignorance, asks his mother what has happened. He is told all in one masterful verse, which the poet has skilfully anticipated, and finally finds himself guilty in an unwitting manner of killing his father and destroying his family. Indeed, all through this passage, Kampan invokes and makes extremely subtle use of guilt, which is entirely missing in Vālmiki: Bharata tries to make his dead father feel guilty for having died (thus foreshadowing his own guilt); he expresses his sense of guilt for having sucked his mother’s breast and stayed in her womb, suggesting his subconscious guilt at incestuous feelings; and finally he suggests the guilt of his mother and asks her to kill herself. Thus the episode is elevated from one of Bharata’s, to my mind, unrealistically simple anger at his mother to a masterful depiction of his many ambivalent feelings in an insoluble predicament. Afterwards, the guilt he feels as well as devotion to his brother impel him to seek out Rāma in the forest in the latter part of the Ayodhyā Kāṇḍa of Kampan, unlike Vālmiki, where Bharata is impelled only by love for his brother. It has been seen above that a sense of guilt and sin distinguishes the Tamil devotional poems from contemporary Sanskrit literature. It is interesting to see how that same feeling is used by Kampan in his version of the Rāmāyaṇa to create a work that is wholly different from Vālmiki. I would add that the introduction of a sense of guilt makes the devotion of Bharata more moving: surely the poet means the reader to identify with Bharata, sharing his sense of guilt and sin.

In Kampan, all the characters are complex, and this includes Rāma himself, who is not always a straight-forward exemplar of virtue, even though, unlike Vālmiki’s Rāma, he is in every verse of the work clearly an incarnation of the god Vishnu. Thus at one point he shoots Vāli in the back. This ambiguity in Kampan’s Rāma has led some to suggest that he is more a man than a god; for example, Zvelebil writes, “If, in one place, . . . Kampan says that it was not easy for him to show the mysterious state of God, he has succeeded, I think, better than Vālmiki to show Rāma as a man . . .”²⁵ In recent times, some anti-Hindu political writers have emphasized Rāma’s faults in order to denigrate him. Yet I cannot help but feel that these critics have missed the point. Time

²⁴ Ibid., 2271–2277.

²⁵ ZVELEBIL, op. cit., pp. 216–217.

and time again, Kampan emphasizes the divinity of Rāma; indeed, every verse of his work is animated by a feeling of devotion. For example, when Kampan describes Rāma's ornamentation for marriage with Sitā, he writes:

As if love itself had taken a form that cannot be harmed
to bring back [to the world] righteousness and ascetic power,
which was being destroyed,
he took a shape too wonderful to describe
and like moonlight touching a dark cloud, he put on sandal paste.

As if the black seething ocean flowered with the moon shining in full radiance,
he wore an ornament in his hair
around which a flower garland of red gold
hung and swayed.

On his ears were two rings
as if the sun and moon had come as messengers
to tell him of Sitā's love
in the day and in the night.

As if to compete with the axe-bearing god [Śiva] whose throat is dark with poison
and in whose hair the crescent moon shines,
he seemed to wear all of the divine lights
as the *tilaka* and ornament glittered [on his forehead].

Like the three lights [of fire, the sun, and the moon] that cannot be attained,
on his breast was the cord [of three strands].
It seemed to be the three gods [Brahmā, Vishnu, Śiva]
whom even the gods and sages cannot know,
and it seemed to say, "Here, all may know and understand easily."²⁶

One must understand, I feel, that Kampan has modelled Rāma to an extent on the ancient Tamil notion of a king, a person who is not in any sense ordinary, but who is a centre of the sacred working in the world. With this ancient South Indian conception, Kampan has combined the notion that Rāma is an incarnation. Indeed, as I read the *Kamparāmāyaṇam*, Rāma is an awesome character whose motivations are hidden and inaccessible. He embodies the notion of *viḷaiyāṭal* (*lilā*), just like the gods portrayed in most of the other Tamil mythological poems. That is to say, he is a divinity who takes part in human experience as a sort of divine game. But the Sanskrit model is modified for Tamil sensibilities: the game is not one of sweetness and light, but one of conflict, war, and suffering. It is altogether fitting that Rāma's character is no more a model of sweetness and light than the game he is playing. This does not make him less divine; rather, if one understands it as the Tamils did, it makes him more so, more a manifestation of that sacred power that, being capricious and characterized by disorder, colours the pages of all Tamil literature, from the beginning to the present. The greatness of Kampan and of the other important Tamil medieval writers of mythological poems is that their approach to worship and reality is multidimensional: characters, both divine and human, have more complexity

²⁶ Kampan Iyarriya Irāmāyaṇam, Pāla Kāṇṭam, part 2, Annamalai 1958, verses 1295–1298; 1305.

and seem more real than their Sanskrit counterparts. Devotion becomes an act defined by intensity of emotion rather than purity. Thus a medieval Tamil poet could write a stanza that seems unthinkable to one versed only in the pious Sanskrit texts of earlier Hinduism:

Even though I am exhausted,
pouring and drinking the drink of lustful union
with soft-natured women
whose words are sweet as candy,
I will not forget your spear,
O warrior who killed the violent demon
as the ancient host of demons
struck their instruments noisily and danced.²⁷

²⁷ Murukavēḷ Paṇṇiru Tirumurai, VI, Madras, Miṇākṣi Kalyāṇacuntaram, n.d., p. 36. This is verse 37 of the Kantaralaṅkāraṁ by Aruṇakirinātar. The poet imitates the noise of the beating of the demons: *tuntun tuṭutuṭu tūṭu tuṭutuṭu tuntutuṇṭu / tūṇṇṭu*. As any remotely literal rendering of this in English would sound strange, to say the least, I have rendered it by “noisily.”

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